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# PARENTS and DELINQUENCY

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| a report of  
a conference



P A R E N T S   a n d  
D E L I N Q U E N C Y

a report of a conference

edited by Helen L. Witmer

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE  
Social Security Administration   Children's Bureau

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## CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Foreword . . . . .   | 1  |
| The Conference Members . . . . .                               | 3  |
| The Meaning of "Responsible". . . . .                          | 5  |
| Parents' Part in Delinquency . . . . .                         | 7  |
| Is Delinquency Always Attributable to Parents?. . . . .        | 9  |
| Are Parents to Blame?. . . . .                                 | 11 |
| Would Punishment Help? . . . . .                               | 15 |
| Some Other Approaches to Parents . . . . .                     | 25 |
| The group discussion method. . . . .                           | 25 |
| Casework and child guidance . . . . .                          | 28 |
| The "area approach" . . . . .                                  | 30 |
| Obstacles to Effective Work . . . . .                          | 33 |
| Environmental obstacles . . . . .                              | 33 |
| Shortage of treatment facilities. . . . .                      | 36 |
| Obstacles in professional attitudes and<br>practices . . . . . | 37 |
| Comments in Conclusion . . . . .                               | 42 |



## FOREWORD

All over the country today, accusing fingers are being pointed at parents. It is they who are to blame for juvenile delinquency, say the headlines. It is their laxness, their irresponsibility, their spinelessness and timidity in the face of adolescents' demands that are causing the trouble. Something drastic must be done about it, many writers and speakers declare.

So there is a growing demand that parents be held firmly to account. In many States it is being proposed that parents be made automatically responsible for the property damage their children cause. In some States the expedient of jail sentences for parents is being considered.

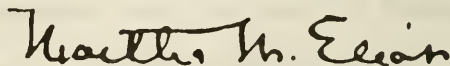
All this is serious business. Delinquency is on the increase, juvenile court statistics imply. And some serious juvenile offenses appear to be becoming more frequent though most offenses are still rather petty, it must be remembered. But is an attack on parents wise? Will it help -- or will it make things worse by adding to parental jitters? And is it fair? Are parents to blame? If so, what parents, to what extent, and in what ways? And if some children's delinquency is traceable to parental factors, by what means can parents be helped to carry out their responsibilities better?

To the Children's Bureau, these are urgent questions. Since the Bureau is responsible under the law for investigating and reporting upon matters bearing on the welfare of children and child life in the United States, it cannot let questions that arouse so much public concern go unanswered.

For the past 2 years the Bureau has been paying particular attention to juvenile delinquency. It has conducted studies and issued bulletins and reports. It has brought together groups of experts from many fields to consider how juvenile delinquents may be better served, to the end that delinquency will be reduced and delinquents rehabilitated. Now, in this report, it turns to the question of the parents' part in juvenile delinquency and of the means by which parents of delinquent youngsters may be helped to do a better job.

The report tells what a group of people whose professional work brings them intimate knowledge of delinquents and their parents had to say about the questions posed above. These people -- whose names and professional connections are listed in the report -- met with the staff of the Children's Bureau for 2 days of discussion on March 5 and 6, 1954. This report is an account of what they said. They did not come to formal conclusions on the questions presented to them. They did not try to draw up a list of recommendations. They did, however, agree on many points, and they raised many questions for further study.

We are publishing this report for your information -- you who attended the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's Conference on Juvenile Delinquency of June 28-30, 1954, and all the rest of you who as American citizens want to form an opinion on what part parents play and can play both in producing and in preventing juvenile delinquency.



Martha M. Eliot, M.D.  
Chief, Children's Bureau

## PARENTS AND DELINQUENCY

Are parents responsible for the delinquency of their children? Would there be less delinquency if parents were held legally to account? Do other measures directed toward parents hold promise of reducing delinquency?

These and related questions were the subject of a 2-day discussion between members of the Children's Bureau staff and a group of psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, and social workers who, from their daily work, know delinquents and their parents well. The gist of what these people said is reported here, not in the order in which they talked nor with the full flavor of their remarks but, it is hoped, with enough detail to stimulate others to continue the discussion.

### The Conference Members

About a dozen people from outside the Bureau came to the conference. No group of such a size, perhaps of any size, can be truly representative of the many professional and lay workers who have important things to say about the questions posed above. These were people, however, who were well acquainted with the daily lives of delinquent boys and girls in various segments of our society and who had worked with parents of these children in such a way as to know their hopes and bafflements. Their present positions and their past, pertinent jobs are listed here so that the reader may know out of what experience they speak in the pages that follow.

Donald Bloch, M.D. Children's Psychiatric Service, U. S. Public Health Service Research Hospital, Bethesda, Md.; formerly psychiatrist for the National Training School for Boys.

Frank Curran, M.D. Director of Child Guidance Clinic, Charlottesville, Va., and in charge of child psychiatry at the University Hospital; formerly on the staff of Bellevue Hospital, New York City.

Margaret C. -L. Gildea, M.D. Psychiatrist in private practice in St. Louis; associated with Washington University and with the school centered activities of the St. Louis County Mental Health Program.

Norman V. Lourie. Executive Director, Association for Jewish Children of Philadelphia; formerly Director of Hawthorne Cedar Knolls School, Hawthorne, N. Y., an institution for emotionally disturbed children.

Richard H. P. Mendes. Director of South Brooklyn Neighborhood Houses, a social settlement located in a high delinquency area.

Joseph Monserrat. Director, New York Office, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Department of Labor, Migration Division; formerly settlement house director and coordinator of street gang activities, New York City Youth Board.

H. B. Moyle, M.D. Until recently, Director of the Hartley-Salmon Child Guidance Clinic, Hartford, Connecticut; now psychiatric consultant to Connecticut State School for Girls, a private school for boys, and the Connecticut Junior Republic.

Alice Overton. Social worker; formerly on the staff of Youth House for Girls, a detention facility, New York City, and later in charge of "aggressive casework," New York City Youth Board.

Harris B. Peck, M.D. Director, Bureau of Mental Health Service, New York City Court of Domestic Relations, and Director of the Court's Intake Project; previously director of a children's psychiatric service in a general hospital.

Edith P. Popenoe. Pupil Personnel Worker in the School Guidance Program of the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland.

Edwin Powers. Lawyer and psychologist; Director of Research and Correctional Education of the United Prison Association of Massachusetts; lecturer at Boston University; formerly research worker in the Norfolk State Prison Colony, and Executive, Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study.

Carl Schoenberg. Director of Casework Services, Association for Jewish Children of Philadelphia, an organization that provides training schools, institutional care, foster home placement, etc., for children, many of whom are unofficial delinquents.

Clifford Shaw. Institute for Juvenile Research, Illinois Department of Public Welfare; Department of Sociology, University of Chicago; previously parole officer for the Illinois State Training School for Boys; probation officer in the Cook County Juvenile Court; social settlement worker in one of the slum districts of Chicago.

Robert C. Taber. Director of Pupil Personnel and Counseling, Philadelphia Public Schools; previously, Director of Probation, Municipal Court of Philadelphia.

Ruth Kotinsky, Chairman. Research worker and editor; Assistant Director of Fact-finding for the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth.

### The Meaning of "Responsible"

In opening the discussion about parents' responsibility for their children's delinquency, the chairman pointed out that we might be meaning legally responsible, morally responsible, or responsible in the sense of cause and effect. She proposed that the latter meaning be adopted; that we inquire whether parents are a primary cause (or an important cause, or one among a number of important causes) of delinquency in children.

The first question stated on the agenda supported this meaning of the word, she said -- "In your work, what clues, if any, do you find to support the proposition that children's delinquency is in some major way attributable to parental factors?" The ultimate purpose of the conference is to find out what measures, if any, directed toward parents are likely to prove useful in reducing delinquency. This question, however, cannot be answered until we know whether and in what ways parents play a part in the delinquency of their children.

This definition of "responsible" was not acceptable to all the conference members, however. "Responsible," said some, means being held to account. "A person is responsible," said one member of the conference, "if I can go to him and say, 'Look, you will be punished or in some way reprimanded or thought poorly of if you do this,' and he is capable of responding to that threat."

Another said, "Yes, responsible does mean held accountable for. In child care you have to hold parents accountable. Parents hold themselves accountable and blame themselves for failure in this respect."

"I'd go farther than that in defining responsible," said a third. "In the popular mind, the question right now about parents being responsible is: Shouldn't they be fined or even jailed for their children's delinquencies? Shouldn't there be an absolute financial liability placed on parents for the damage their children inflict on property? I think responsible means legally responsible, so far as most people are concerned."

In the manner of this conference, no definite decision was arrived at on this point of definition. Actually, however, all three meanings were used in the discussion that followed. One line of reasoning and evidence was to the point of whether parents, by their attitudes and behavior, can promote or contribute to the delinquency of their children. A second line referred to the question: Why aren't parents carrying out their responsibility of rearing children to be law abiding? Are they to blame for their failure? Then, in the light of facts and opinions put forth in answer to these questions, there was a third line of discussion about the efficacy of legal measures for holding parents to their responsibilities, and about other means that are used or might be used to help parents deal better with delinquent behavior on the part of children.



## Parents' Part in Delinquency

Brief discussion in abstract terms led the chairman to set forth the proposition that parents are one among a constellation of interplaying factors that give rise to delinquency. "Is this so?" she asked. "If so, what is the part that parents play? In what ways may parents contribute to their children's delinquency?"

To take up the last of these questions first, the following points were made by various discussants.

Parents may contribute to the delinquency of their children by their absence from home, one person said. They may be separated or divorced. One may be in a mental hospital or in prison or in a tuberculosis sanitarium. For example, a survey of some 1,800 juvenile delinquents at Bellevue Hospital (New York) over a period of years showed that approximately 60 percent of these children were products of broken homes. However, these same delinquents had brothers and sisters who were not juvenile delinquents. Therefore, the broken home may be one of the many things that has to be taken into consideration, but it is far from the whole story.

"Children do find their roots in their parents," said another, "but the degree to which they find them hinges upon the stability and harmony and warmth of the home. A broken home with one parent missing can be more stable than a home with two parents who are continually at odds."

"For another thing, some parents actually encourage their children to steal, actually send them out to steal," said another discussant. "In one case I knew, a boy used to go out to the five-and-ten and bring things home that were useful in the kitchen, and his father praised him for it. The boy told us he had stolen 30 different times, and the police didn't even know him. The father used to say this was the smartest boy he had. Other members of this family were also delinquent -- even the parents were delinquent. They clearly incited the boy to delinquency."

"I think you can multiply the illustration of deliberate stimulation to steal by a few thousand times, and then you will have the number of parents who unconsciously stimulate

their children to strike back at society," said another. "These parents have been hurt. As a result they are opposed to a wide range of social institutions, including schools, police and social workers. They talk to their children about being railroaded to prison, about teachers being down on them and not teaching them to read. They stimulate the kids to truant, to strike back at the teachers, to feel that they are picked on and abused.

"Then there's the matter of parents setting bad examples. Johnny's father comes home after putting through a highly questionable business deal and says 'Pulled a fast one today.' What is the kid going to think but that he can pull the same thing among his peers? What can you expect?"

Adverse parental attitudes, adverse parent-child relationships also came in for considerable discussion as factors in delinquency causation. "Parents are sometimes and in some ways unable to give the youngsters the kind of support or help they need to make a social integration," said a psychiatrist. "They do not give the youngsters a sense of belonging. The youngsters feel that people important to them don't care. As a result, they develop a considerable degree of antagonism. One girl told me not long ago that she hated her mother because her mother lied to her. This girl lost what seemed to me was of very great importance: the ability to trust a person of primary importance to her. As a result, she could no longer trust anybody, either her mother or any of the rest of us. When we find a youngster who has no effective relationship with adults, we have one who cannot keep to rules and so he gets into delinquency.

"I almost always ask a youngster, 'Whom do you like here?' If I find that he has a father or mother or social worker or somebody that he thinks really understands him and he feels some liking for, I usually find that we have some basis for treatment. If he says, 'No, I don't like anybody,' and really means it, I think we will have an extremely difficult problem in helping him come back to a social point of view.

"The string of evidence that I seem to pick up in case after case of these predelinquent and delinquent children is their feeling of insecurity and inadequacy," said a school

worker. "Oftentimes this doesn't spring from neglect. When you work with the parents, you find that the thing that is operating is too high expectations and too much pressure on the children. The children, in turn, feel that they are not pleasing their parents, not coming up to their expectations, and they become resentful and often then end up doing these delinquent types of things."

"We saw that in the Army," said another. "The family pattern was that of an ultrapunctilious father, a strained wife, and the kids not able, apparently, to sustain the standards of conformity that were being established even more sharply as you went up the military pyramid. The result was that the most serious stealing of Army materials, say, or the most serious vandalism came from 'the colonels' kids,' who had such high value put on conformity that many of the children couldn't stand it."

"Then there is a small number of parents," added the psychiatrist, "who say, 'I have no interest in this boy at all.' The destructive effect of that kind of a situation is obvious, and there isn't much you can do to help. I knew one youngster whose mother, having put the boy in an institution, offered to pay another boy to report on her boy, on the things that he did. That was finally and tragically destructive."

### Is Delinquency Always Attributable to Parents?

Comments and illustrations such as the above began to make it look as though parents are usually one of the primary causes for delinquent behavior. This conclusion was sharply challenged in a description of a concrete situation that Mr. Mendes, head worker in a water-front settlement house in Brooklyn, presented.

"Is it the parents or is it something in this cockeyed society of ours that is wrong?" he asked. "I will give an example. A group of Puerto Rican boys came into our settlement house 3 or 4 years ago. They were a pretty conforming group, though they had their problems. They were younger than most of the other teen-agers, so they didn't represent any threat to them. They go along pretty well in the settlement house, and they got along pretty well outside.

"After about a year, when we felt that we were making good progress with them, they began to be attacked by a gang in their school district. The attacks started with stopping one or other of the boys when he was alone. 'Stopping' in Brooklyn means that when a boy is walking down the street, a group of boys suddenly appears in front of him and stops him and shakes him down at point of a knife or under threat of dire consequences. This happened not only on the street, but it happened in the school buildings, in the school corridors. It happened every day to these Puerto Rican boys of ours and we knew about it.

"Gradually these Puerto Rican boys began to stick together wherever they went. More and more restrictions were placed on them in their school neighborhood. They were only supposed to walk on a certain side of the street. The Puerto Rican girls could stay only in a certain part of the girls' yard. They were all living under real terror.

"Of course, it didn't take very long before these Puerto Ricans wanted to fight back. As good social-working peacemakers, with a good relationship with this bunch of kids, we said, 'No, don't fight. Let us call the police. Let us blanket the area with police. You stay in the settlement, and when the Rumlbers (this was the name of the other gang) see the police in the area, they will break up and you won't have any fight.'

"This went on for a year and a half. Every single time we called the police, it was at the specific request of the group of Puerto Rican boys. It began to be more and more difficult to get them to accede to our calling the police. Because we weren't allowing them to fight, they were subject to more and more abuse. On top of that, they were being called 'chicken;' they were being called 'punks.' So a tremendous tension was being built up inside them, a tension to the point where they started taking it out on us in the agency.

"After a year of taking it out on us, every time they walked in I could see the backs of my staff go up. Their first reaction would be, 'Well, what are you going to do now?' Because by this time the Puerto Rican boys were going in for petty vandalism -- not aggressive behavior against people but aggression against the building and general uncontrollability.

"Finally, it got to the point where I was the only one in the building who had any control over them. The situation went from bad to worse until even my relationship with them deteriorated. Then when we in the settlement house became cops instead of friends, there was very little, if anything, we could do to help the boys.

"Finally, they had their fight. And they are still having their fights -- those of them who are around, for many of them are now in prison. One boy was killed as a result of one of their fights.

"Now we have to get back to where is their parents' responsibility. These were Puerto Rican parents. We worked with the parents. The parents were desperately upset at what was happening and they tried their best to do something about it.

"Then what was the responsibility of the parents of the other gang -- of the children who were the instigators of this whole thing? We rapidly found out that, in keeping with the prevailing social norm in America today, where prejudice is the norm rather than the exception, these parents were prejudiced against the Puerto Rican kids. They had a deep need to be prejudiced. But do we say that because our society permits and/or encourages feelings of prejudice that the parents are responsible when they transmit such feelings to their children?"

### Are Parents to Blame?

This illustration made it clear that there are situations in which parents play no part in the delinquency of their children -- unless they may be said to have caused delinquency by the mere fact of being the people they are, in this case individuals who for cultural reasons are looked down upon by their neighbors.

In this connection, a remark of another conference member is pertinent -- a comment to the effect that juvenile gang wars and the prejudices that they represent are not confined to New York and Chicago. "In Charlottesville," said this speaker, "when we have gangs -- when they break each other's glasses or jaws or what-have-you -- it is the kids from the county high school versus the kids from the

city high school. The ethnic problems are there. The minority problems are there exactly the same as in a big city."

The illustration also showed that there is a real distinction between two of the meanings of "responsible." To be a "primary cause of" is clearly not always equivalent to being "accountable for," in the sense of being blameworthy.

Other illustrations heightened this conclusion. The most detailed was given by Dr. Peck of the New York City Court of Domestic Relations.

"Mrs. Phillips was a mother, a Negro woman, who broke broomsticks over her kid's back in an attempt to discipline him," said Dr. Peck. "The boy was 15 when he was brought into court for attempted rape and robbery. This mother described her son as a boy who literally had never spoken a fresh word to her in his entire life -- by which she meant his life prior to adolescence.

"Let me quote from what she said in a discussion group for mothers that we hold in the court. Trying to explain why she had such a rough time with her kid, she said, 'It is because the children have indecent company . . . . The relief allowance is always too small . . . . If you want to live in a better place, you have to get the extra rent money yourself, and I just can't do it . . . . The relief doesn't give you the necessities for living, to say nothing of the extra things the children ask you money for, the things they really need to bring to school. And I can't furnish it. This makes me feel very bad and embarrassed. When the children need money so bad, it drives them to get it the wrong way . . . . My son won't do anything any more. He just loaf, and I have no husband to tell him what to do . . . . I don't have even a piece of a husband . . . . You want a man in the house. Maybe it is because of the money or something.'

"Mrs. Phillips summarized her problem by talking not just about herself but about her neighborhood and how she sees things. She said the majority of the people in the neighborhoods where children get into trouble are poor people. 'Maybe like me they do everything trying to make the children happy.' (And she meant this, even though she broke broomsticks over her kids. You had to believe her,

as the group finally came to believe her. It was out of frustration that she broke broomsticks.) 'But when it doesn't seem to be of any use at all, I just go out and I work and I work, and when the children are bad, I whip them, even though I know it doesn't do any good. I have nobody to advise me, and I would like to know more about what to do about this.'"

In this case, environmental and intrapsychic factors combined to produce a situation in which a mother, in outraged frustration, acted in a manner conducive to delinquency in her son.

In other cases, the parental behavior that leads to delinquency in a child may be proper behavior in the cultural group to which the parent belongs. Mr. Monserrat gave an example of this sort.

"In the settlement house of which I was director, we used to have dances every Friday night. One evening a 16-year-old girl came up to me and said, 'If my mother asks, don't tell her I am here.' I said, 'Why?' She said, 'I am not supposed to be here because a good Puerto Rican girl isn't supposed to go to a dance by herself.'

"There were 350 kids in the place and, as all you people who have been in settlement houses know, we were terrifically understaffed. I couldn't give her the attention she needed. Sometime later there was the beginning of a rumble in the middle of the floor. I thought perhaps two of our street clubs were having a difference of opinion, but it was a woman dragging a girl out of this room of 350 kids. I saw that it was the girl who had spoken to me and her mother.

"I went to visit her the next day, and I said, 'What is the problem?' The mother said to me, 'You are helping to make my daughter no good.' I said, 'What do you mean no good?' She said, 'You know, a good Puerto Rican girl shouldn't go out with every Tom, Dick and Harry.' And she went on to tell me what makes a good Puerto Rican girl according to the way she was brought up, according to what she knew was right, and she was absolutely right according to her scheme of values.

"I turned to the youngster and I said, 'What is your problem?' She said, 'My mother is old-fashioned.' I said, 'Why do you say she is old-fashioned?' She said, 'Well, I was coming out of school Friday and Carmen said to me, "Johnnie is going to take me to the dance," and Mary said, "Tom is taking me," and they turned around and said, "Dolores, who is going to take you?" 'What was I going to tell them? That my mother wouldn't let me go out? What is wrong with my going to a settlement dance?'

"In one family you have two people who are absolutely right, depending on which value system you use. You have a situation where the parent and the community are in a clash, and the kid is caught in between the two. The parent is acting according to what he or she feels is absolutely right, and so is the youngster, and the community doesn't know where it stands, or what to do about it. Can you say parents are to blame in situations like this?"

In still other cases the parents may be doing all they know how to prevent delinquency but without avail. Mr. Mendes gave one example of this sort.

"Some time ago I had occasion to be in a school talking to the disciplinary officer. He was telling me that they really didn't have any troubles in that school, everything was going along just great. And indeed it was, for at that very moment a boy was being knifed in the school yard. I went out to see what was going on, and a bit later I went over to the hospital that the boy had been taken to. This was about a half hour later and the boy's father was there.

"The father was walking up and down the hall. His boy was in the emergency ward, quite seriously hurt. The father was walking up and down, up and down, and he was beating his fist into his hand and saying to a friend of his who was walking with him, and then saying to me when I came along, 'What can I do? I beat him every night. I tell him not to go around with these kids. Just last night I beat the daylights out of him.' And his friend said, 'Yes, last night he beat the devil out of the kid.'"

Mrs. Popenoe, out of experience as a counsellor in a well-to-do suburban county, gave another example along much the same line.



"I had a conference with a parent yesterday after seeing her child, 7 years old. He is quite emotionally disturbed, and he is quite a behavior problem -- very nervous, can't sit still, isn't learning to read. He fights constantly and children complain that he always gets them into trouble when he is around. The father, a service man, expects instant obedience from this child. The mother says that nothing the child ever does pleases the father. She is somewhat of a perfectionist herself, holding very high standards for table manners and behavior. Actually, both parents are trying to do a good job, seeing in their high standards a way to help their child become a good citizen, although ironically enough, it is the pressure to meet these high standards that is causing the misbehavior."

Blame is clearly not the word for it in situations such as these. To come to this conclusion, however, is not to absolve parents from responsibility for doing a good job with their children, the conferees agreed. This is parents' responsibility. The question to be answered is how parents who are not carrying this responsibility well (that is, who are acting in such ways that they become one of the factors making for delinquency) can be helped to do better. How, in other words, as one member of the group put it, can we "do something positive for parents in a way that does hold them accountable for their children's behavior?"

### Would Punishment Help?

At the present time on the statutes of most States there are provisions whereby the juvenile court can take action against parents as well as other adults who contribute to the delinquency of a minor. Today, in practically every State, there is a strong demand that these laws be enforced more vigorously and that legal measures be strengthened.

For instance, in Boston recently (said one discussant) the juvenile court judge sentenced two parents to jail for 3 months for contributing to the delinquency of their minor child. The child was on probation at the time and stayed out all night. The parents, too, were out -- off drinking somewhere -- and didn't know where the child was.

In New York City several years ago (said another) there was a famous case of this sort. In somewhat similar circumstances, the Children's Court judge sentenced a mother to jail. She was a near psychotic woman. They got her out before she served her term, but she was in jail for several months before she was finally released.

There are bills pending in some States that would put an absolute liability on parents for property damage by children. That is, negligence on their part would not have to be proved.

The question was raised: Are laws inflicting automatic penalties on parents good? Would they lessen delinquency? The following statements give the gist of the conferees' opinion on this subject:

Said Mr. Sheridan, a lawyer on the Children's Bureau staff, "To place that kind of legal responsibility on a parent, I think, is unsound, legally and socially. If there is negligence in the contributory sense, if parents actually participate in their children's delinquency, they can be held criminally liable in most States. In most States, too, civil action against the parents is possible, if they were negligent in controlling the child and if that negligence was the proximate cause of the delinquent act."

Said Dr. Peck, "I think these punitive measures run counter to everything we have been saying here. Take this instance of a woman who was put in jail instead of being given psychiatric treatment. Just try to get outpatient mental hygiene service in New York City for such a parent today, much less treatment for the whole parent-child constellation! The city bounces this mother off, doesn't provide her with the essential medical care that she would need to take care of her child, and then punishes her for having failed to bring him up well. Kurt Eissler has said the delinquent is the scapegoat, not only in his family constellation but in the whole community. In cases of the kind I've cited, the community falls down and then uses the parent as the scapegoat."

Said Mr. Mendes: "None of us sitting around this table is going to say that all law is ridiculous and that the whole legal structure of a society is something that has no place. So what are we bothered about? Is it that there is some-

thing about the parent-child situation that indicates to us that retributive law is not going to be a significant factor in decreasing delinquency that comes from this cause?

"We can point to boys who become delinquent because of the pressure their parents put on them. Can we doubt that laws of this automatic type are going to put more pressure on parents and that that pressure is going to be transmitted to the children? In the light of what we have already said here, can we think that such pressure will lead to good behavior? It seems to me it can only result in even more antisocial behavior."

Said Mr. Beck of the Children's Bureau Delinquency Project: "Automatic, punitive laws are also wrong because they assume that parents are involved in all delinquency situations. Yet among the cases described here it seems to me that in perhaps the predominant number, the cause was more social-cultural than one of parent-child relations. So it simply isn't appropriate to use, in every case, measures focused on parent-child problems.

"Another misconception back of these compulsory laws is that parents will change under coercion; that is, that you can make people change by punishing them. It requires extensive, prolonged efforts to change people's behavior, and more subtle methods than putting them in jail."

Why, then, if the effectiveness of these newly proposed statutes is likely to be so slight, is there so much pressure for them? Various reasons were cited. For instance:

Mr. Lourie said, "I think that where there is a punitive attitude towards parents it represents a kind of frustration about not knowing what else to do. So little is known about the etiological elements that produce delinquency in a child. These proposed laws are just a way of trying to hold the line because we don't know what else to do."

Mr. Beck said, "When people are frustrated, they jump at anything, and blame is one of the things they seize upon. Right now people are frustrated about reducing delinquency. For another thing, people react strongly against antisocial behavior because their limited control of their own hostility engenders a desire to punish the person who acts out and breaks the windows they would like to break -- or sanctions such action by being the delinquent's father."

Dr. Bloch added, "I think that we ourselves may have contributed to the situation in two ways. First, we have used alarm as a way of getting additional needed services for delinquent children. We are alarmed, but also we use the alarm we feel to alarm the public, and then the backlash hits us.

"Second, we have made too extravagant promises about our ability to reduce delinquency. Moreover, we compromise ourselves. We say that such-and-such an amount of services is needed. Yet we have such an illusion of omnipotence that if we are provided with 1/85th as much as we asked for, somehow we think we can do something wonderful with it."

One counter-measure -- a long-range one -- to the drive to punish parents for their children's misdeeds was suggested. Linking the public's desire for punishment with its fear of delinquents, Mr. Lourie said that if social workers could become more confident in their own understanding and handling of these youngsters, their conviction would gradually get "rubbed off" on the public.

"I think," he concluded, "that the more we are able to help our own folks work with these youngsters, the more we will be able to translate to courts or the general public or the parents the feeling that these children can be helped and do not have to be feared. Out of the development of that kind of attitude, which will be translated into services, we shall gradually eliminate the need to punish parents."

In summary, then, the group agreed that laws putting an absolute liability on parents for the delinquency of their children would be unfair and ineffectual and might even make matters worse. In saying this, however, they did not mean that the use of legal measures to hold parents to their responsibilities is always unwarranted. In fact, well used, the law can be a valuable instrument for this purpose.

Dr. Bloch gave one example of such use of the law that permits courts to take children away from parents who are mistreating them.

"We had a youngster in psychiatric treatment," he said, "who was involved in a very intense relationship with his mother. The mother used him to act out her own unconscious impulses toward criminal conduct. The fact that

the court was willing to commit the child enabled us to make some useful therapeutic moves that undoubtedly we could not have made if we had not had the authoritative backing of the court."

Mr. Taber, out of his experience in the Philadelphia school system, made a statement about the results of the use of the compulsory school attendance law that at first seemed startling to many in the group. The following abstract of the discussion highlights the points at issue.

Mr. Taber: "Last year, before the magistrate's court, the Board of Education prosecuted 666 parents on a charge of neglect. Fines and costs were assessed. Several parents went to jail overnight; none for more than 3 days. In 67 percent of these cases our studies show that the child's school attendance improved, and we have reason to think the parents took more responsibility as a result of this legal action."

Asked for explanation, Mr. Taber continued: "We select as cases for prosecution those in which the parent is primarily responsible for the truancy. If a child truant and his parents don't know about it and are willing to do everything possible to alter matters, we wouldn't take the parents to the magistrate's court, though we might take the child to the juvenile court if this seemed called for.

"We use authority in what we think is a constructive way. For instance, when our attendance officers are not able to get a youngster to school, when he is flagrantly absent, we will have a juvenile aid worker in plain clothes go to the home, get the youngster out of bed perhaps, and take him to school. We have had miraculous things happen through that sort of action: through having somebody knock on the door and say, 'Look, bud, it's time to go to school.'

"People yield and come to grips with themselves at many different thresholds. Some never do. Those are the ones who eventually go into correctional institutions."

Dr. Peck: "I would be opposed to that procedure for certain groups that I think might fall into your category. Some of these Puerto Rican parents we have heard about are undoubtedly really contributing to truancy. They do a lot of things to keep their kids from going to school. The kids probably don't want to go in the first place, but the parents add to the problem.

"It is perfectly true we could take the kids to school, and we could put pressure on the parents to send them. We could probably force these parents to make these children go to school. To that extent we could say we had improved the situation. But from the point of view of ultimate mental health, I wonder whether we would have achieved very much.

"To take a single case, I have in mind a family that, 4 years before they came to our court, was living in the mountains of Puerto Rico. They spent a year or so in the slums of San Juan before they came to this country. Only the mother and children came to New York, maybe because women find it easier to get jobs there.

"The boy went into a classroom with a teacher who didn't even speak his language, and he sat around for a year or so. So the mother began to keep him out of school -- not out of ignorance of the law but because she really needed to have this 15-year-old boy go to work because she was having a hard time getting along, with three other kids in the family, and so on. So the court makes her send this boy to school. What good does that do? Isn't it a bit misleading to say there has been improvement here, even though the boy's school attendance improves?"

Mr. Taber: "In cases of this sort we would write a special report and request appropriate school placement, which the child you cited did not enjoy. It would be considered by a supervisor in the central office, and court action would be determined upon the basis of whether the parent is really responsible. In other words, if the parents are handicapped, or there are reasons beyond the parents' control, we would not prosecute.

"For instance, there was a father, not in desperate financial need, who let his son go out 'junking' every day and did nothing about his coming to school. And there was a mother, not employed, who kept her 15-year-old daughter at home to take care of the younger children while she went of on junkets.

"Your Puerto Rican case would not be what I call plain indifference. You have to look back of each situation separately. For instance, if we see something in the school experience that is bad, we may arrange for a

school-work program. We have had kids, for instance, with IQ's of 60 and 65 who had no academic motivation. A group of them were placed in the class where they work half time and go to school half time. Their attendance has gone up to 92 percent, higher than the school average, because now their education is related to a job and they have an interest that is compelling to them."

Mr. Mendes: "But what if you have a vocational school setup where the vocational schools are the dump for those kids who don't get along in the academically oriented schools?"

"I have an example of two 15-year-old Puerto Rican girls who came in with their parents to see me. Their parents asked me, 'Don't my children have to go to school?' I said, 'Yes, they do.' I made an appointment with the principal of our local school so that they would get a better welcome than most of these Puerto Rican youngsters. They went to the school, and they lasted exactly one day. They lasted one day because these two girls were subjected to such miserable treatment by the boys in the school, and the teachers had absolutely no control over the situation."

Mr. Taber: "I think we are confusing the issue. I don't think authority ever should be used to shunt a child into something that is not adapted to his needs. There are many deficiencies in the educational system. We ought to have more remedial reading, more school counsellors, more adaptation of the curriculum to children's needs. But, aside from this, there is still the question of how best to hold indifferent parents responsible for living up to their duties under the law."

Miss Kotinsky: "I quote from Dorothy Barclay's report in the New York Times of Judge Polier's speech the other day. 'A Study of the Board of Education published in 1948 indicated that improvement in school attendance after court action was less marked than in the cases of children whose parents were not fined. In addition to this, a larger proportion of children whose parents were fined in the first case were back in court a second time in the same school year.'

"I don't know anything about that study, but the differential between it and the one Mr. Taber reports seems to be that in Philadelphia they use court action against a carefully selected group of parents. This careful selection seems to be the crux of the matter."

Mr. Schoenberg: "It seems to me that we are saying that there are probably some situations in which the punishment or blame or whatever the parent has taken out of a court hearing has facilitated his getting into a program of treatment that has been helpful. Caseworkers everywhere will say that there are such cases. But there are also cases in which court proceedings have never been of any help."

Mr. Mendes: "When we question how court action will change parents' attitudes or feelings for the better, we must recall that we start off with about four strikes against us when we deal with parents in high-delinquency areas. These parents and their children don't have our attitudes about police and courts being there to help them. I don't think we can come up with anything positive about the use of court action in these cases."

Dr. Moyle: "I have seen a great many youngsters who have been through court. I have seen them after commitment. Where a pretty bad punishment was administered by the court, the child was almost invariably hardened against the court, the judge, and anybody else who wanted to help him. This kind of action only ties children tighter to their delinquent parents. It makes them and their parents unable to think of any responsibility they have under the law. Severe treatment by a court certainly lessens the chance of reaching either parent or child."

Mr. Taber: "I have seen a family constellation change entirely after a court experience. To be sure, we run the risk of a parent and a child relationship being severed and more separated by that kind of thing. We watch it carefully, however. Generally speaking, the father may take hold in a different way and the whole family constellation of relationships will change for the better.

"For instance, there was a case where the father was a pipsqueak and the wife was highly neurotic and dominating the household. After these parents came before the court, the father took hold in a masculine way, really began to act like a father. The boy, who had been stealing, running away, playing truant, began to make an excellent record.



"A lot depends on how it is handled. Fortunately, we have counsellors in the schools who are able to handle the hostility that court action usually generates and can help make the court experience a constructive one for the family and the child."

In the subsequent discussion two chief points were made: (1) that this careful use of court action is comparable to other methods used by social workers to reach parents who are unresponsive to the usual casework methods, and (2) that this kind of use of court authority to hold parents to their responsibilities should not be equated with punishment.

Miss Overton: "In many ways Mr. Taber may be talking about the same approach some social workers are trying out nowadays. The court is here used as a mechanism to approach parents who have stayed away, to insist that they recognize their responsibility and to find out why they have been unable to measure up to it.

"I could give an illustration, too -- quite a few of them -- of parents who thought school was completely unimportant, who had declared war on the schools, just as the schools had declared war on them. After some attempt to find out what was the basis of these parents' antagonism to the school and to help them to see that they were only making more trouble and their own kids' heads bloodier by fighting against a force that was stronger than they, we were able to bring parents and school together. In one case of this kind, a mother later raised Cain because the school principal had not sent for her. This was a mother who had refused ever to go to the school, even for an act of malicious mischief. Her first words now were, 'I am responsible for my boy's being in school and his acting properly there.'

"Mr. Taber is not really giving us an illustration of the effect of a punitive device. All the way through, he is describing positive steps, through the use of court action, to strengthen parents, to increase their sense of responsibility. So his remarks do not illustrate the effectiveness of a punitive device. I am not theoretically opposed to punishment, but I just have never been able to figure out in what way punishment would enhance parents' ability to care for their children and to give a better quality of support to them."

Mr. Taber: "What do you mean, punishment? You don't consider this punishment. Right? Nor do I."

Dr. Bloch: "One of the ways in which a state of being responsible is induced in a person is by his being held responsible. You have a quiver full of arrows for treatment. You are using counselling; you are using a school program; you are using a whole host of things. We would not want to discard court action. But equally so, we should put it in perspective.

"The danger, I think, is that the public's tendency is to use court action as the cure-all. The public, very understandably, is in search of a panacea."

Mr. Taber: "There are times for surgery. A lot of cases get into surgery that should not. It is the discriminating use of this surgery (court action) that makes the difference.

"To me, authority is very important, but it must be discretionary and it must be used on a selective basis. The superintendent of our schools sits down with three others of us once a week for 3 hours and we go over what we call potentially dangerous cases. We have handled 400 in the last 5 years. We have learned that our big problem is the indifferent parent, getting them into some kind of treatment.

"We have even had parents come down to sit with us at the long table. Very impressive. When the parents realize that we are concerned about their child, their own concern is sometimes sharpened to the point where they can get up steam to go to a clinic or to file a petition, let's say, for placement."

Mr. Sheridan: "We were talking originally about a law, a blind, punitive, revengeful law, that regardless of the situation imposes a sanction on an individual.

"I don't think that kind of a law ever accomplished anything constructive. It is unsound legally; it is unsound socially. On the other hand, I hope we are not saying that there is no room for legal sanctions and use of authority in regulating parents' conduct and, of course, the conduct of all of us.

Mr. Taber: "Why don't we settle that very quickly by saying that the present practice of juvenile courts to require restitution by children for damage done, according to their ability to pay, plus the present law about contributing to the delinquency of minors are sufficient, and that any law over and above that defeats its own purpose, by being a punitive instead of a constructive measure?"

### Some Other Approaches to Parents

Through the discussion reported above a tentative answer with respect to one group of parents was arrived at -- the parents who, out of indifference to the law or to their children's welfare, permit or encourage delinquent acts. With such parents, legal action is sometimes effective in mobilizing a latent sense of responsibility, it was said.

What about parents whose relation to the delinquency of their children is not that of indifference? The conference group did not arrive at an exact equating of types of parents and the preventive or remedial measures to be used. Certain parallels did emerge, as the following excerpts from the conference record suggest, but the main emphasis in the discussion was on methods of work and on obstacles to effective work, without much attention being paid to what particular types of parents would benefit.

#### The group discussion method

The usefulness of the group discussion method as a means of helping parents of delinquents or predelinquents was emphasized by Dr. Gildea and Dr. Peck.

Dr. Gildea started her description by pointing out the difference between preadolescents and adolescents with respect to parental influence and said that therapeutic efforts with parents are especially likely to be productive when the children are young. Mrs. Popenoe agreed and added that potential delinquents can often be spotted in kindergarten, first, second, and third grades.

Dr. Gildea then described a program of group discussions that has been quite successful in securing the interest of parents of problem children who are in the lower grades in school. She noted, however, that this program did not appeal to parents of all social strata.

Dr. Gildea: "In discussing what parental factors are most important in causing delinquency, it seems to me we have been saying that it is largely a matter of parents' attitudes. In the case of the Rumlbers that Mr. Mendes described, it was the attitudes of the parents toward Puerto Ricans. In the case of the parents Dr. Peck described, it was the attitudes of the parents toward frustrations; in many sectors of our population it is the attitudes of parents toward their children's behavior and performance and toward child-rearing in general.

"Well, then, what we have to do is to get at the parents. There are lots of different ways of getting at parents, I am sure. I'd like to describe two particular kinds of ways that we have been working on in a sort of a pilot-plant fashion in St. Louis.

"The first is that of education of parents in general, education in child raising and mental health. This is carried on, not through lectures but through discussion groups led by parents who are from much the same cultural setting as the parents who are in attendance.

"The second is that of education of parents of preadolescents who have been identified by teachers or other school staff as potentially delinquent. These parents are invited to come in and talk with our worker, and then they are gotten together in therapy groups for discussion of their problems in child rearing.

"When the groups first get together there is invariably much said about the school's fault. But after a few sessions that drops out and the parents are able to recognize that the problem that the child is exhibiting in school is related to what is happening at home.

"At first we thought this was very easy to do. We had almost universal success in getting parents together in groups. But as we have gone on, we have found there are certain areas of the city in which we cannot get parents' interest. This is one of the really anxiety creating and thought provoking problems.

"In the first place, we failed utterly in the Negro districts, whether we used a white person or a Negro as a group leader. Apparently Negroes in St. Louis are so suspicious of authority that they can't bring themselves to join any of

our groups to discuss their personal problems. They protect their problems completely outside. They are very absorbed with difficulties which are related to minority discriminations.

"The second group we have completely failed to reach are the fairly prosperous families who have moved out to St. Louis County. They won't come near the school. Right now we are trying to find out what the reasons are and to overcome them.

"Perhaps the school is not the best of institutions through which to conduct these neighborhood discussion groups but, in our experience, it is almost the only one available. I do think, however, that the neighborhood group, no matter where it meets, is the answer to the problem of how to change parents' attitudes."

The usefulness of the discussion group is not limited to parents of young children or to parents of particular social backgrounds, said Dr. Peck, as he told of his experience with this method in the New York City courts.

Dr. Peck: "In the Bureau of Mental Health Services in the New York City Court of Domestic Relations we have been especially interested in work with parents. Some years ago we set up therapy groups for the ones with whom we didn't get anywhere in individual treatment. These were parents who didn't want to talk to a social worker or psychiatrist about their role in relation to their children's delinquency. They would say, 'It isn't our fault. It's the fault of the schools. Our kid is discriminated against because of his color. The schools are not good. They are too big. He doesn't have a teacher who even speaks his language.'

"The worker would think that this might all be true but she would know this mother had broken a broomstick over her child's back, so she would be inclined to label the mother's explanation as resistance and displacement of her responsibility onto the teacher.

"But when we took these same parents in a group and listened to all of them saying, 'It's the schools. It's the discrimination,' etc., we couldn't be so sure it was only resistance. So we were forced to listen with something more than the nice, permissive, social worker's smile, and we

began to get somewhere with them. We found that after these parents had rid themselves of their more inappropriate guilt, they were able to turn, in a much more productive way, to consider their own role in their children's difficulties.

"This way of working with mothers is not always successful, of course. But with those mothers who had failed to improve even after 6 months to a year of individual treatment, we made varying degrees of progress in about half of the cases.

"We no longer reserve group therapy for those who can't be helped by individual treatment. And we have improved our group therapy techniques. For example, we now have group discussions even at intake. We have a group of parents in together. We sit down with them over a cup of coffee and discuss what the clinic is and what they may want to get out of it. Altogether, we think group discussions and group therapy are very important means of working with parents."

#### Casework and child guidance

Casework and individual psychotherapy also have a part to play in helping parents deal with delinquency in their children. This is especially true, it was said, if some of the traditional methods are discarded and an attempt is made to "reach out" to clients.

Miss Overton: "To be more effective, casework agencies will deliberately have to seek out the disorganized families. We in agencies frequently know families before the children are delinquent but we usually sit back and wait for them to come to us or we insist that the parents must be able to ask for our help. We do not deliberately seek out areas of social infection and try to move in on the problems as the families see them.

"I am optimistic about the so-called inaccessible families. I believe they are as scarce as hen's teeth if you really bend your back to get to them. I think the casework concept about working only with those who 'want help' has been so screwed up with rationalizations that we have interpreted it to mean ability to ask for help around certain problems that we choose to treat.

"More exploration of all this is needed. Essentially what is required is a little more respect for parents than we have hitherto accorded them."

Mr. Shaw: "I agree with you that the delinquent is very largely outside the pale of the whole range of social agencies. In child guidance clinics the trend has been away from delinquents to middle class and upper middle class children. In 1952, for instance, there were 86 referrals to the Institute for Juvenile Research from a North Side area in Chicago and 32 from a colored district on the South Side. Perhaps 200 boys got into the Juvenile Court from the North Side area and over 2,000 from the South Side one. In addition, almost all the 86 North Side children were accepted for treatment, and very few of the South Side ones."

Dr. Bloch: "That is happening all over the country. There isn't a clinic or an institution, court connected or originally set up to deal with delinquents, that isn't becoming greatly interested in childhood schizophrenia and the neuroses of the middle class. They find that such cases are very productive in therapy, that they can really get somewhere with them, and so they are giving up treating delinquents."

Dr. Curran: "I think it depends on the philosophy of the people in the clinic. When I went to Charlottesville, between 80 and 90 percent of our referrals were coming from the middle and the upper classes. We had practically no court referrals. Now between 60 and 70 percent of our patients are welfare or court cases or come from the lowest economic brackets. And they come for both study and treatment.

"This has happened because the director feels that it is very important to give services to delinquents and their parents and because I had a lot of experience in working with them and know I can do a great deal to help. But both social workers and lower class clients, especially Negroes, have to be convinced.

"We found that when we had some social workers from Scotland and England on our staff, more and more of the Negro people came to the clinic and stayed on in therapy; that is, when they were having therapy with someone whom they felt comfortable and on a par with. I know that is very important. I know that these delinquents and their parents can be helped in a clinic. But you have to persuade

your staff not to be afraid of the patients, and not to be afraid that the clinic will be closed if some patients 'act out' a bit during treatment."

### The "area approach"

A very different way of helping parents was described by Mr. Shaw, originator and director of the Chicago Area Project. This plan is based on a conception of delinquency causation that is only indirectly related to the attitudinal one on which educational and therapeutic efforts are founded. It assumes that, in slum areas at least, delinquency is largely a by-product of the deterioration in social relationships and the lack of social cohesiveness that characterize present-day living. Accordingly, this approach is directed to the community rather than to individual families.

Mr. Shaw: "In urban slum areas, as a result of a combination of circumstances, a lot of children become involved in a way of life in which a premium is placed upon delinquency and skill in committing delinquency. In these areas, boys can enhance their status chiefly by being clever delinquents.

"In that situation I don't see how you can help parents by talking, by making suggestions, though sometimes that is useful. I think what you have to create is a situation in which parents themselves can be a creative part of the effort to meet the needs of these delinquents and the society to which they belong.

"Too long, in large cities, we have depended upon what we call philanthropies, where people in privileged circumstances decide what the people in these blighted areas need, and in how large doses. That doesn't work. I think the basic thing that we have to try to use is the greatest potential available, the organized effort of the people who live in those areas. We must recognize them as human beings like ourselves; recognize them as people who are interested in their children, just as we are. In 35 years I haven't encountered many people in slums or outside who weren't interested in their children. I don't think we are going to help them by police methods or by punitive efforts of any kind, or by giving them something, either in the way of programs or something else. We can help them best by discovering some way to utilize their talents, interests, capacities, and understanding.



"The kind of neighborhood I am talking about is the kind in which there is not just tacit approval of delinquency but positive approval. I could give 200 illustrations of this, of kids who specialized in burglary and disposed of thousands of dollars worth of stolen merchandise right in their own neighborhood -- sold it to restaurant owners, to storekeepers, and to citizens generally.

"I think one way to help parents in such areas is to find a way by which they can participate in some kind of venture that goes beyond themselves, some kind of group or collective effort of which they can be a part. Otherwise, how do you build strength into these parents; how do you give them a sense of direction? That is part of the problem, just as it is in reaching the child himself.

"Believing this, we in the Chicago Area Project, over the past 20 years, have helped neighborhoods to organize themselves for action in regard to the welfare of children. Through neighbors' own efforts, aided in part by State money and a little advice from our central office, recreational and educational programs have been set up, various sorts of community action have been engaged in, and work with individual delinquents has been carried on.

"We have found it extremely useful to employ as staff those whom we call marginal persons, individuals who themselves were delinquent but who are now established in some lawful pursuit, or individuals who have lived close enough to delinquents to have some sense of what they are like and what their feelings and attitudes are. Such persons can make contact with delinquent youngsters and establish the first, perhaps weak, link between them and conventional society. And that may serve as the means of breaking down the barrier and incorporating them into some kind of constructive social group.

"We have enough statistics to show that this is not the whole answer to delinquency prevention, but there is a lot of merit in it. I am sure that in these blighted areas we have to think in terms of creating some kind of human instrument that consists of the people themselves."

The conference members did not regard these various approaches as antipathetic. Rather, there was considerable discussion touching on the question of their integration and their mutual support.

Dr. Moyle, for instance, said he found Mr. Shaw's idea of using "marginal workers" very suggestive and cited an example of a delinquent girl who recently told him that one of the other girls in the training school had been her chief support in keeping straight. Therapy is greatly aided when such marginal workers are on hand, he implied.

Dr. Peck agreed with Mr. Shaw that making parents the main movers in any program concerned with children is essential. He questioned only whether the maladjusted parents of delinquents, who most need the satisfaction that comes from collective effort, would be able or willing to participate. Some therapeutic work with them may be necessary first, he thought. Nevertheless, this plan of, as he put it, "enabling parents to join together to deal with some of the conditions that thrust them and their children into pathology" is a very relevant one for delinquency prevention. And he thought that his Mrs. Phillips might have been helped more if her complaints about school, recreational facilities, day care, etc., had been voiced in a discussion group in a neighborhood center rather than in a court or a clinic.

Miss Overton expressed somewhat the same idea, saying that what is needed is a bridge between the measures for collective action that Mr. Shaw described and the efforts at motivating parents to do something about their problems that the new forms of group work and casework are making. A social worker who would go out after the so-called resistive parents and try to involve them in a social relationship could be such a bridge, she thought.

Mr. Shaw suggested another kind of bridge. "What I would like to see," he said, "in an area with a high concentration of delinquency, would be a psychiatric unit sponsored and operating in a united way with the whole range of social agencies and with the organized residents. If we could have a combination of all of the approaches we have talked about, operating as a unit in conjunction with the people of the community, we could learn much about delinquency and the treatment of delinquents and their parents."

## Obstacles to Effective Work

Throughout the discussion there were frequent references to attitudes and situations that handicap work with parents and children. Some of these lie within the helping professions themselves; others are encountered in the environment in which these professions work. Added to the scarcity of knowledge about how to serve delinquents and their parents effectively -- and the scarcity of effort in putting into effect what we do know -- these obstacles make for severe curtailing of accomplishments.

Reference to some of these obstacles has already been made in this report. In the discussion of the use of legal authority in dealing with truancy, for instance, adverse conditions in school and court were cited as limitations in the method. In other connections, reference has been made to social workers' fear of delinquents and dislike of an authoritative approach. It seems worthwhile, however, to line up here the various obstacles that were discussed, for they should be taken into account by those concerned with program planning.

### Environmental obstacles

Perhaps enough has already been said about poverty and its attendant miseries as causes of such exasperation and frustration in parents as almost to preclude treatment efforts that aim at improving parent-child relations. As Miss Overton kept saying, people who live in severe poverty in large cities have been hurt by so many experiences that it is only by the most painstaking kind of work that they can be reached at all.

Another obstacle cited by several conference members was that of school conditions so unfavorable to children's development that parents could scarcely be expected to encourage attendance or attention to studies.

As one speaker put it, "What do you do in situations that I know of where there is a jungle of distrust between children and teachers, between teachers and parents, between principals and teachers? You can hardly conceive of what goes on in some schools in low income areas in some of our largest cities. To the teachers it is like being sent to purgatory to be assigned to these schools, while to the parents the attitudes of the teachers seem so unpleasant that the whole situation is a miserable one."

Some hope for improving the situation was held forth, however, by several speakers. Mr. Shaw told of the fairly successful efforts of groups of parents in neighborhoods associated with the Chicago Area Project. Dr. Peck was of the opinion that parents' hostility could be reduced through group discussion, and Miss Overton gave some examples of caseworkers being effective go-betweens in parent-school situations.

Another obstacle to the giving of help to parents of delinquents was found in the attitudes and practices of some juvenile courts. The prejudice of some judges against one or another category of cases was cited: against Negroes, for instance, or against the Irish with their alleged alcoholism, against families with frequent mental illness or with poor reputations in the community. Callousness or indifference on the part of some judges was also mentioned. "In fact," said one psychiatrist, "a court clinic may even be doing parents and children a disfavor if it reduces their antagonism and leads them to expect careful consideration of their story by the court."

On the other hand, several psychiatrists, out of personal experience, told of courts that gave as much attention to the details of the family situation and to the needs of children and their parents as would the best clinical worker. Even in courts in which this kind of consideration for individual welfare was not the rule, they were inclined to think that unwise judicial decisions resulted more often from feelings of frustration than from lack of concern for the welfare of families.

It was pointed out, too, that psychiatrists do not always serve courts well. As Dr. Curran put it, "Many psychiatrists serving courts know nothing about children or about adolescents. They have had little or no experience in the field of forensic psychiatry.

"Some of us have been trying for years to establish postgraduate centers for the training of psychiatrists and to promote interdisciplinary discussions and studies between psychiatry and the law. In general, the psychiatrists are antagonistic to and have a very belittling attitude toward the judges. On the other hand, the judges are sure that psychiatrists are dopes. Closer relations between the two professions are obviously needed if delinquents and their parents are to be well served.

"I think it is important for us clinical workers to know that judges want our help if we can be practical and realistic. We should also reappraise our relations with probation officers. These people, much overworked, often know a great deal about a child but don't have time to write up their information and send it to the psychiatrist. Instead, they tell it to the judge, and the psychiatrist feels that the probation officer is trying to knife him.

"In these ways, then, the teamwork process doesn't always work as it should. To improve that process is the very first thing that should be done, for it is the judge who handles parents and interprets to them the laws and the plans for the child."

It was also noted that judges have a function to perform in relation to parents and children that is different from that of social workers and psychiatrists. Dr. Peck put it as follows:

"Remember that one of the reasons we don't want to have all this work with delinquents carried on within some glorified child guidance clinic is that the law is also there to protect the family and children from, among other things, psychiatrists and social workers, so we don't go plucking children out of their homes without regard for the parents' constitutional rights."

Dr. Bloch agreed and added, "Actually the imposition of prison sentences on youngsters by administrative procedure on the basis of extralegal decisions is sometimes horrifying. It happens all over the country. I saw one kid who ended up in an adult prison for the insane, who was neither an adult nor insane; and the only crime this kid had ever committed anywhere along the line was stealing a bicycle.

"It happened that this boy got one sentence and complained about it. So they pushed him up the line to the training school. He bucked on that, and they bucked him to the psychiatrist, and back and forth, back and forth. He finally ended up in prison because he was thought to be neurotic and in need of treatment."

Examples of constructive relations between judges and psychiatrists or court clinics were described. Several said that much personal contact for discussion of cases

is needed. Having a clinical team examine a child and talk matters over with his parents need not impinge on either a judge's prerogatives or the constitutional rights of a client, it was said. Such examination can lead to knowledge about psychological and social processes at work in the child and his family. The information thus secured will not bear on the judge's question of whether the child did or did not commit a delinquent act but it may influence the judge's decision about how to dispose of the case.

### Shortage of treatment facilities

Such comments led to discussion of another set of obstacles to effective services to parents and children, those represented by shortage of treatment facilities and inadequacies in their services.

On the subject of shortages as they affect the work of courts, Dr. Curran had this to say:

"I think it is important for you people to know that there are less than 10 psychiatric clinics attached to juvenile courts in the entire United States. That means there are thousands of courts that have to refer children and their parents to hospitals or city clinics when they want psychiatric opinion. In Virginia, for instance, families may have to travel as much as 500 miles to get to a clinic in which the child is seen once and the parent perhaps not at all. In addition, these courts usually have no trained probation officers, so there is little information about home and community conditions for the clinic to work on.

"What a psychiatrist can say in a letter to a judge is not usually very helpful to either the judge or the child. What is needed is a close, back-and-forth relationship where the psychiatrist can sit down with the judge and the probation officer and discuss the whole situation. We need this teamwork approach that we all talk about but that doesn't exist so far as juvenile delinquents are concerned.

"The demand for clinic services has to come from the courts. When the judges themselves feel that they are getting service that really helps them, then they will go out of their way to get it. Of course it is expensive, and we don't always have the professional workers available. But the biggest problem is that there is so much confusion and

misunderstanding and overt antagonism between members of the legal profession and members of the social work, psychology, and psychiatry groups that at present judges in most parts of the country don't want psychiatric service except when a lawyer says, 'I demand a psychiatric opinion.'"

Mr. Lourie added, as another shortage affecting courts and leading to judges' frustration, the scarcity of facilities to care for delinquents and other children who are emotionally disturbed. Few training schools are equipped to treat this kind of child, he said, and residential treatment centers are both scarce and expensive.

Mr. Taber listed other shortages that affect both the possibility of serving parents and children well and the likelihood of delinquency itself. "In Philadelphia, for instance," he said, "there is an average delay of 9 months between arrest and Juvenile Court hearings. Because of shortage of staff, many violations of probation are ignored and children are therefore abetted in being delinquent. There are 300 children on the waiting list of the institutions for the mentally defective. In the United States as a whole, half a million children are on half sessions because of shortage of school buildings. Residential schools providing psychiatric care are much too scarce.

"It seems to me," he summed up, "we are too timid as professionals. We suffer from the hangover of considering health and welfare services as charities, whereas they are basic to the well-being of the country. The Administration is committed to a public works program if we have an economic depression. We ought to be in there laying the groundwork for getting funds for facilities like mental hospitals, children's residential centers, psychiatric clinics, institutions for defectives, and so forth. We could also use marginal workers, in Mr. Shaw's sense of the word, by the hundreds. All this could be a part of a public works program if we have conviction and clarity and will move in."

### Obstacles in professional attitudes and practices

The third type of obstacle to effective service to parents and delinquent children lies in the attitudes and practices of the professions that supply the services, it was said. Among the latter was one noted by Mr. Lourie that bears upon the point just made.

Said Mr. Lourie, "We are sometimes too glib about this question of needing new resources and new services. In many areas the question is not whether to build new facilities but how to make proper use of the ones we have.

"It is my conviction that many of our children's agencies have rejected the kind of children and the kind of parents we are talking about. What is needed is a real sense of conviction that delinquents and their parents can be helped."

Among the other impediments to effective work that were noted were prejudice against parents, fear of delinquents, reluctance to use authoritarian methods with them and their parents, the tendency to affix labels and to emphasize weaknesses rather than strengths, and the split between social action and therapeutic measures.

Some comments along these lines have already been included in the report. The following are the other points that were made. For the most part, these were expressions of individual opinion and were not discussed by the group in any detail. They are included here in the spirit in which they were made -- as indications of a kind of soul searching on the part of devoted practitioners rather than as criticism of the professions' work.

Miss Overton: "I think a considerable obstacle to helping parents to accept their full responsibility is our own lack of respect for them and their tremendous role in child care. I can list several points that may convince you of this. One is our premature and ill considered taking of children out of their homes on neglect charges, before any serious attempt to strengthen family life has been made. Another is our insistence, even in first interviews, on talking about the child's problems and brushing aside the parents' descriptions of the burdens and preoccupations that have helped to make them fail as parents. Again, lack of respect for parents and their task is implied in our impossible prescription for parents, which calls for almost perpetually flowing love and affection for children without the expectation of anything in return.

"Such attitudes and actions are considerable blocks in the way of our doing something positive to help parents in a way that holds them accountable for their children's behavior."



Dr. Bloch: "Then, too, we have a lot of trouble with our use of authority. Why do we become social workers and psychiatrists? Because we want to deal with everybody with love. Love, it's wonderful. We dish out large quantities of it and we receive large quantities of it. And we dislike being authoritarian.

"I think this relates not only to how we deal with delinquents but to how we deal with parents. We ought to be able to say with good conscience to parents, 'We are interested in your being able to be a good parent. To the degree that you cannot do that for yourself, we must, as representatives of society, step in and take over.' We should do this in a respectful and supportive way, and also in an economic way, both psychologically and socially, for obviously we can't spend years in the effort.

"Then, too, we and our colleagues in courts and correctional institutions manage to institutionalize a complicated series of distance maneuvers by which we get farther and farther away from the painful personality of the distressed and unhappy persons. For all of us there is a great deal of anxiety attendant upon facing squarely the problems of parents and youngsters. Judges, custodial officers, parole officers, social workers, all who deal with delinquents and their parents, have need of the most careful kind of support that we who are psychiatrically trained can give. If their anxiety can be lessened, it will be unnecessary for them to use the red tape, the complicated administrative machinery and so on, which they interpose between themselves and delinquents."

Mr. Shaw: "We put up barriers between delinquents and their parents and conventional society when we put labels on children who have deviated somewhat from the accepted course. As professional people, we all participate in this. We usually set about to find the negative things. We call the children delinquents, and we use a lot of other words that imply stigma. So, step by step, this child, and often his parents too, get separated from conventional society. The problem of rehabilitation is to find out how we can bring these outcasts back into some kind of significant relationship to the rest of the community. It would be more helpful if we did not contribute to separating them in the first place."

Miss Overton: "Yes, I think we have been rather hopeless about selling down the river the parents who will not come to us and use our services. We have concentrated on their pathology and their past adversities, instead of looking for what, in strength, has held the family unit together, and what there is to work with and to build on.

"For another thing, I think we have erred in conceiving social action as something quite separate and quite removed from our work with the emotional and personal and internal factors of a family or individual. They are part of a continuous thing. Whatever defects in the social mechanism exist that adversely affect and cripple families and pull them apart, we have to act on them too.

"We can do that in a day-to-day operation. We don't have to pass a law or change a whole community. Maybe we can soften the impact of one clinic doctor that a family is afraid of. Maybe we can go to one school and persuade teachers who have been prejudiced against a whole family of kids to write positive reports, to give little words of encouragement to the families, to accord a certain amount of dignity to the angry or timid mothers who come to their office instead of browbeating them.

"This in my book is social action; it is a part of 'working with the environment.' I want to see social action and aid to individuals brought together, so that defects, irritants, splits, and divisive things that hurt family life are removed, and parents and children are benefited."

Another obstacle to preventive work of a therapeutic nature is presented by the fact that delinquents and their parents are not identifiable until offenses have been committed. They may be identifiable, however, as people who are deprived. Dr. Bloch reasoned along this line as follows. Although the conclusion he arrived at was not specifically discussed, concurrence with it seemed implied in many of the other remarks cited in this report.

"The cases we have heard described in this conference bring home the real seriousness of the problem that anyone who wants to do anything about kids in trouble and their parents is up against.

"I have seen delinquents from upper middle class and middle class families and I find them not too remarkably different from the lower class kids. The hallmark all along the line seems to be deprivation, both for the youngsters and for their parents.

"Now, deprived people need support, in whatever way and of whatever kind is particularly suitable to their own condition in life. They may need individualized psycho-therapeutic support if they are upper income people whose essential problem is profound emotional insecurity and who relate to their youngsters in a rejecting, punitive way. They may need support in form of a grocery bill being paid, with a few bars of candy thrown in, if poverty is their chief problem. And so on.

"These people -- delinquents and their parents -- are not the only ones who are deprived and who need support. This leads me then to my constant query as to whether services for delinquents should not be services for all children.

"I know that there is a good deal of difference of opinion about this. There are certainly some unique problems in the handling of delinquents and in the relations with courts. But I have wondered whether we should distinguish delinquents as a group or, even more, distinguish the parents of delinquents as a group.

"This is particularly true if we are talking about preventive work through a service program. We don't have instruments which will identify people who are going to be delinquent, but we do have good instruments for identifying families that are deprived and need help.

"I would suggest then -- for prophylactic efforts with parents at least -- that we concentrate on strengthening all kinds of support programs (of which Mr. Shaw's program is one) and not regard parents of delinquents as a special case."

## Comments in Conclusion

As was said at the outset, this conference did not end with a list of recommendations being drawn up or even with a statement of consensus being made. The discussion was so lively that nobody wanted to take time for such work. Two statements of a somewhat summary nature were made, however, toward the end of the meeting. They are cited here in lieu of conclusions -- which we are inclined to think the reader will have drawn for himself in any case.

Mr. Taber: "I would like to read a brief statement on 'blame,' which I prepared last night after thinking about our day's discussion.

'The recent barrage of criticism against parents as being wholly responsible for juvenile delinquency is unfounded. To be sure, parents are the primary source of a sense of responsibility and respect for law and order in their children. To the degree that there is warmth, stability, and harmony in the family, to that degree children will have a sense of well-being.

'The unwarranted criticism of parents has made them distrustful of themselves to the point where they do not trust their common sense. Parents should be encouraged to follow their natural inclinations until they find that what they believe in does not produce results. If their efforts are ineffective, they should turn to counseling or family service provided by the community.

'The competing factors which now confront parents are myriad. As soon as our children leave our doorsteps we can no longer extend a protective arm. They are catapulted into the tensions, temptations, and crosscurrents of our modern day. We no longer know the genealogy of their playments as parents once did. Our children are exposed to children of all levels of culture and morality. The back-to-the-woodshed movement is an escape on our part from facing problems realistically.

'One thing is paramount, that we hold our children accountable. To do otherwise is to do them a disservice. Marriage, family, and job require a sense of accountability. To permit a child to indulge in every whim and fancy is to

build him up for a severe setback. As parents, we must be clear and consistent in our discipline and hold our children accountable until they have demonstrated their right to increasing freedom.

'We cannot, however, in good conscience, hold parents wholly responsible for delinquency as long as there are wars, or fathers are in the armed services or on night shifts and therefore are token fathers, or when divorce is so frequent. Parents are also caught in the crosscurrents when courts are delayed in hearing cases, when truancy is not considered a violation of probation, when social workers' case loads are so high that no effective follow-up is possible, when intake of guidance clinics is shut off, when admission to institutions for defective delinquents is delayed unduly, when resident centers for psychiatric care are practically nonexistent.

'The problem of delinquency has many facets and no one group can be singled out for blame. There is no room for the silent or hypercritical partner. As parents and community, we are jointly responsible and must join forces to meet the problem on a broad basis.'"

Dr. Moyle: "Perhaps we can sum up by saying that we should explore every way that is possibly effective for mobilizing parents' interest in reducing delinquency. We should try authoritative methods if they seem necessary in particular cases. We should try working out substitutes for parents when their interest seems nonexistent. We should reject blind punishment and accept the necessity of finding some way of helping parents be effective parents. If we do this, we shall begin to get somewhere with the problem."

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